

At the end of the seven days which we occupied in the ceremonies connected with the fulfilling of the vow, Paul, with the other men, went to the temple in order to make the offerings, which were necessary in connection with the vow. When the Jews which came from Asia saw him there they were incensed at his presence, as they always were wherever they met him. They had failed in their own country to stop his work and his influence, though they persecuted him many times, and very severely. Now they thought they had a good opportunity of putting a stop to his work entirely, and so they stirred up all the people, until the mob set upon Paul and began to beat him. These Jews claimed that Paul had been teaching men everywhere against the customs and the law of the Jews, and prejudicing them against the temple. And they said that he had polluted the temple by bringing Gentiles into its sacred enclosure. They had seen Paul with two Gentiles in the city, and they took it for granted that when he went into the temple he had carried his friends with him. The whole city was soon in an uproar because of the activity of these persecuting Jews, and they drew Paul out of the temple, and for fear that he might get back there, they shut the doors at once. They determined to kill him, but this could not be done according to their law in the temple or near its precincts, and before they could decide what to do, and where to carry him, the commander of the Roman soldiers heard of the trouble.

Just at one corner of the temple grounds had been built large barracks for the Roman soldiers. The commander called out a number of soldiers, probably several companies, and they came down into the outer court of the temple where the crowd was gathered, and when the people saw the soldiers they stopped beating Paul. They knew they were acting without authority, and knew they would be held responsible by the Roman government. Supposing that Paul had committed some crime, the chief captain had him arrested, and bound with two chains, each one probably fastened to the hand of a Roman soldier. When he had secured him, he demanded of those about him who he was, and what he had done. The mob began answering his questions and giving him many different answers, and so through all the tumult and confusion, he could get very little information so he ordered that Paul should be taken into the castle, that he might there find out more about him. Notwithstanding the fact that he was being protected by the soldiers, the fury of the mob was so great that it was necessary for the soldiers actually to carry him to keep him away from the mob. They raised against him the same cry that had been raised probably by some of those same people against our Saviour when he was on trial before Pilate. When they came to the foot of the steps leading up into the castle, Paul asked the privilege of speaking to the chief captain. He was very much surprised to find that Paul could speak Greek, and asked if he was not the Egyptian who recently had headed a revolution in the adjoining country. Paul replied that he was a Jew, native of the city of Tarsus, and this fact would account for his speaking Greek; and he asked permission to speak to the people. This permission was granted, and Paul using some gesture, which seems to have been peculiar with him, as it is mentioned several times, attracted the attention of the mob and they became quiet so as to hear what he said. Before he had spoken in Greek to the chief captain, but now he spoke to the

Jews in Hebrew. The next chapter, a part of which will be our next lesson, gives Paul's speech.

VOWS AND VOW-MAKERS.

By Professor George L. Robinson, Ph. D., D. D.

A vow is "a promise made to God," as Thomas Aquinas defines it. It is more than a bare promise, however; it is a solemn covenant, for the fulfillment of which one at once begins to make active preparation, so that, as W. Robertson Smith puts it, "the life of the votary, from the time when he assumes the engagement, is taken out of the ordinary sphere of secular existence and becomes one continuous act of religion." Frances E. Willard once suggestively remarked, "My life is a vow."

The practice of making vows is very ancient. Even the sailors, after throwing Jonah overboard, "offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah, and made vows." Jonah 1:15, 16. In crises of grave peril, or of pressing need, men naturally appealed to their god for help and protection. When embarking on an enterprise of more than usual anxiety, or when in sickness, distress, or any other trouble, they sought divine assistance and made, as it were, a bargain with God to go on long pilgrimages or undergo much privation in order to secure the divine favor.

In the Old Testament the earliest instance of vow-making is that of Jacob, who vowed that if Jehovah would keep him in all his journeyings to Mesopotamia, and bring him back again in safety to Canaan, he would become thereafter Jehovah's worshipper and offer him tithes. Gen. 28:20-22. Jephthah, likewise, in the days of the Judges promised that if Jehovah would give him victory over his foes, the Ammonites, he would sacrifice whatsoever came forth from the doors of his house to meet him upon his return. Judge 11:30, 31. Hannah vowed that if God would give her a son she would dedicate him to Jehovah all the days of his life. 1 Sam. 1:11. By thus vowing, it was often thought one could live a life of greater loyalty to God. The Nazirite especially placed himself under sacred, lifelong obligation to abstain from drinking wine and not to allow a razor to come upon his head.

Vows were always voluntary. One was under no necessity to vow, and there was no sin involved in not vowing, cf. Deut. 23:22; but when once vows were made they must be scrupulously fulfilled. Deut. 23:21, 23; Num. 30:2; Judges 11:35; Prov. 20:25; Eccl. 5:4, 5. The penalty for violating a vow seems to have been nothing less than death, if we may judge from the emphasis placed in Num., ch. 30 on the "bond" of "soul" the votary was under.

Hebrews and Arabs in the Orient today frequently bind themselves with similar covenant vows. Baldensperger in his volume entitled "The Immovable East" (p. 261) tells a story of how, when smallpox broke out in a certain village in Palestine and the eight-year-old boy of a neighbor became dangerously ill, his mother vowed that should he recover she would offer a sacrifice to el-Khadr, and she fulfilled her vow. People in the East have a very sensitive conscience. There is an Arabic proverb which says, "A man who keeps not his word has no religion." And the Koran teaches, "Be true to a covenant, for a covenant holds a man responsible. Be faithful to your pledged covenants and keep your oaths."

The New Testament says little about vows. Christ utters but one short, sharp word of rebuke to those guilty of Jewish casuistry, who, as creditors,

would say to their debtors, "What you owe me is corban," i. e., an offering to God. Yet they would actually dedicate but a small portion of it. If their debtors would still refuse to pay they became guilty of sacrilege. But the trick became a serious crime when a man practiced it on his needy parents as a pretext for refusing them the aid which the law enjoined, saying to them, "That wherewith thou mightest have been profited by me is given to God." Matt. 15:5. The epistles are quite silent in regard to vows. But in the book of the Acts there are two allusions, ch. 18:18; 21:23-26, in the first of which Paul, having shorn his head in Cenchreae, vows not to have it shorn again till he should reach Jerusalem; while, in the other, he is advised by the Presbytery of Jerusalem to share the company of four men who have already a vow upon them, and to "be at charges for them, that they may shave their heads," and thereby escape accusation and arrest. By offering the hair as a sacrifice along with other sacrifices the ancient supposed that they were thereby brought into closer relation with God, from whom they were estranged through sin.

The great benefit of vow-making to the Christian is that it helps to keep him on a higher religious and spiritual level than would other wise be possible.—Westminster Teacher.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIETIES

THE GREATNESS OF GOD.

M., Sept. 4. Great power. Isa. 44:1-8.
T., Sept. 5. Great love. John 3:16.
W., Sept. 6. Great mercy. Ps. 103:1-18.
Th., Sept. 7. Great salvation. 1 Pet. 1:1-5.
F., Sept. 8. Great presence. Ps. 139:1-12.
S., Sept. 9. Great leader. Deut. 32:1-12.
Sun., Sept. 10. Topic—The Greatness of God. Ps. 145:1-21.

How does nature speak of God's greatness?
How is God's greatness seen in Christ?
How can we use God's greatness in life?

"Great God, how infinite art Thou,
What worthless worms are we."

When the Westminster Assembly were preparing the Shorter Catechism they came to the question, "What is God?" For some time they discussed what answer should be given. And they found themselves unable to form one that was satisfactory. It was proposed that they should go to God Himself for help. The youngest member of the Assembly, whose name was Gillespie, was called on to lead them in prayer. He began in this way: "O God, Thou who art a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in Thy being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth, we come to Thee for help." When he was through one of the older members said that God had answered them in the very beginning of Gillespie's prayer. These words, only slightly modified so as to be a suitable answer to a question were adopted, and no finer answer to that question has ever been prepared in any language.

Great Power (Isa. 44:18): Great power is admired everywhere, whether this be seen in the physical strength of a horse or locomotive, or in the mental strength of the head of some great business organization, or of some great scholar. Nowhere is such great power seen as in God. By a word He created the whole universe, and by His power He holds all in place. His power is exercised so wonderfully that He controls the revolution of the spheres, and at the same time preserves and cares for the tiniest insect. This infinite power God is ready to exercise in behalf of His people, protecting them against their great enemy, Satan, and giving them all needed help in the accomplishment

of any work that He assigns them to do.

Great Love (John 3:16): The great difference between our God and the heathen gods is that our God is a God of love, whilst theirs are gods of anger. "Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13.—God in the person of Jesus Christ our Saviour showed the greatness of His love by giving His life for us, not when we were friends, but when we were enemies because of sin. In return for this great love and the salvation which it has provided for us, He only asks that we trust Him and love Him and serve Him. We can never estimate the greatness of this love without considering the greatness of the sacrifice which was made to show it; and with all the consideration and study which we may give to the sacrifice we can never know how great it was or what it meant to the Son of God to leave his home in heaven to live and suffer and die for us poor sinners. We ought to be willing to make any sacrifice that is necessary in return for all that he has done for us. Every sacrifice made for Christ brings its own joy and happiness.

Great Mercy (Psalms 103:1-8): The sinner who realizes how he has sinned against God may well feel that God does not love him, and that He deserves only punishment at the hand of God for his many and great sins. Whilst God is a just God and has said that the soul that sinneth shall die, He is also merciful and gracious. Mercy is goodness shown to the undeserving. God in great compassion looks down upon His erring people and has compassion for them, and is ready to show to them great mercy in forgiving them their sins, whenever they come to Him asking for forgiveness. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). The sinner, no matter how great his guilt may be, need have no fear of coming to God and asking for forgiveness and salvation. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him" (Psalm 103:13). The prodigal son when he found himself in great need felt sure that the father would receive him when he came back confessing his sins, and he was not disappointed in this. Our Father will not withhold any good thing from those that love and trust Him.

Great Salvation (1 Peter 1:1-5): The greatness of salvation which God has provided for us may be seen when we take into consideration its author, what it cost and what it accomplishes. The author of salvation is the triune God, God the Father is the creator and preserver of all the universe, God the Son is His only begotten and well-beloved Son, equal with the Father. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the trinity, is the active agent in all of the redemptive work for the salvation of the lost world. God the Father planned salvation and made the great sacrifice of giving His only begotten and well-beloved Son that He might provide salvation for sinners. God the Son gave his own life, with all its sufferings on the cross, in order that he might carry out the will of the Father and provide redemption for the sinner. God the Holy Spirit labors in the heart of man "with groanings that cannot be uttered" in order that he may persuade the sinner to accept the offer of salvation, and that He may give to him who accepts it all the benefits of the redemption purchased by Christ.

If we think of what this salvation accomplishes we can see something of its greatness. When we find a remedy for some fearful disease that